

Georgia Southern University

Digital Commons@Georgia Southern

---

Legacy ETDs

---

2002

## Perspectives on Black - White Interracial Relationships in the South

Celeste Andria Wheat

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/etd\\_legacy](https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/etd_legacy)



Part of the [Sociology Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Wheat, Celeste Andria, "Perspectives on Black - White Interracial Relationships in the South" (2002). *Legacy ETDs*. 271.

[https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/etd\\_legacy/271](https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/etd_legacy/271)

This thesis (open access) is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. It has been accepted for inclusion in Legacy ETDs by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@georgiasouthern.edu).

PERSPECTIVES ON BLACK-WHITE INTERRACIAL  
RELATIONSHIPS IN THE SOUTH

Celeste Andria Wheat



PERSPECTIVES ON BLACK-WHITE INTERRACIAL  
RELATIONSHIPS IN THE SOUTH

A Thesis

Presented to  
the College of Graduate Studies of  
Georgia Southern University

---

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master's of Arts  
In the Department of  
Sociology

---

by  
Celeste Andria Wheat

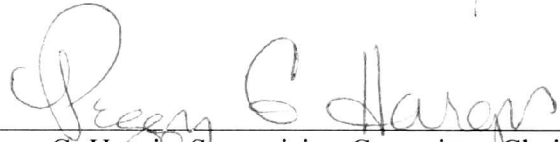
August 2002



July 29, 2002

To the Graduate School:

This thesis, entitled "Perspectives on Black-White Interracial Relationships in the South," and written by Celeste A. Wheat is presented to the College of Graduate Studies of Georgia Southern University. I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master's Degree in Sociology.



Peggy G. Hargis, Supervising Committee Chair

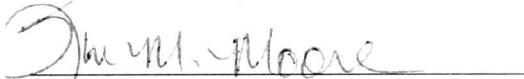
We have reviewed this thesis  
and recommend its acceptance:



Nancy L. Malcom, Committee Member

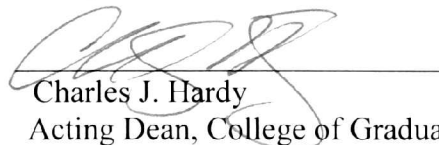


Nathan W. Pino, Committee Member



Sue M. Moore, Department Chair

Accepted for the College of Graduate Studies



Charles J. Hardy  
Acting Dean, College of Graduate Studies

## DEDICATION

To Mom and Dad, in appreciation for your love, support and encouragement

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank Dr. Peggy Hargis, professor of Sociology for her ideas, comments and mentorship throughout the process of writing my thesis. Also I would like to thank, Dr. Nancy Malcom, and Dr. Nathan Pino, professors of Sociology, for their comments on drafts of my thesis and for their service on my thesis committee. Thank you to Dr. Jay Hughes, professor of sociology, for providing me with research equipment. I also greatly appreciate the help of Dr. Amy Chasteen Miller, professor of Sociology at the University of Southern Mississippi for her comments on drafts of my paper. I also would like to show my gratitude to the sociology professors at Georgia Southern University and the University of Southern Mississippi for sharing their knowledge, support and time with me through the pursuit of my research endeavors. Also I would like to thank all of the interviewees who participated in this study, and shared their time and insights. Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank my mother and father for their patience, support, and encouragement during the completion of my thesis.

## VITA

Celeste A. Wheat  
15 Pine Knoll Drive  
Petal, MS 39465  
E-mail: celesteAW31@aol.com

### **Education**

M.A. Sociology, Georgia Southern University, August, 2002

B.A. Sociology, minor English, University of Southern Mississippi, August 2000

### **Teaching Experience**

Fall 2000 –Spring 2002

Graduate Teaching Assistant, Department of Sociology,  
Georgia Southern University, Course and supervising  
professor: Introduction to Sociology, Dr. Peggy Hargis

November 2000

Guest lecturer for Introduction to Sociology Course  
Georgia Southern University  
Topic: The Social Construction of Gender

Fall 2001

Guest lecturer for Introduction to Sociology Course  
Georgia Southern University  
Topic: The Social Construction of Race

### **Other Professional Experience**

2000-2002 Sociology Representative for GSU Graduate Student Organization.

### **Publications**

Wheat, Celeste. 2000, "Wheat's Contribution to Relationship Studies" *Visions* graduate school newsletter at Georgia Southern University, November edition.

### **Professional meeting presentations**

Sex, Color And Power: 'Interracial' Relationships In American Motion Pictures, 1959-1999" paper presentation at the Southern Sociological Association Conference in Atlanta, GA. April 2001

"Sex, Color And Power: 'Interracial' Relationships In American Motion Pictures, 1959-1999" paper presentation at the Mid-South Sociological Association Conference, in Knoxville, TN. October 14, 2000

"Sex, Color And Power: 'Interracial' Relationships In American Motion Pictures, 1959-1999" paper presentation at the Mississippi Academy of Sciences Conference in Gulfport, MS. February 24, 2000

**Grants**

- Spring 2002    Awarded Graduate Student Research Grant from Georgia Southern University.
- Fall 2000      Awarded Graduate Student Professional Travel Grant from Georgia Southern University to attend the Mid-South Sociological Associations Meeting in Knoxville, TN.

**Professional Memberships**

- 1999-2001    Mid-South Sociological Association
- 2000-2001    Southern Sociological Association

**Academic Memberships**

- 2000 to present:    Alpha Kappa Delta International Sociology Honor Society
- 1999 to present:    Golden Key Honor Society
- 1999 to present:    Gamma Beta Phi Honor Society
- 1999 to present:    Gamma Sigma Alpha National Greek Academic Honor Society
- 1999 to present:    Phi Theta Kappa, USM Alumni Chapter
- 1998 to present:    Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society

**Teaching Workshops and Seminars Attended**

Certificate Program in Teaching Skills and Techniques, Graduate Assistant Workshop Series, Center for Excellence in Teaching, Georgia Southern University, January 18 – April 12, 2001

“Introduction to Excel,” Center for Excellence in Teaching, Georgia Southern University, September 19, 2000

**Scholarships, Honors and Awards**

- 2000            Winner of Mid-South Sociological Association’s Undergraduate Student Paper Competition.
- 2000            Received Teaching Assistantship to Georgia Southern University
- 2000            University of Southern Mississippi’s Sociology Student of the Year
- 1999-2000    McNair Scholar
- 1999            Nominated for the Order of Omega
- 1999-2000    President’s List, University of Southern Mississippi
- 1998-1999    Dean’s List, University of Southern Mississippi
- 1996-1997    President’s List, Jones Junior College
- 1997-1998    Recipient of the Howard Family Scholarship for Academic Excellence
- 1998-2000    Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society Scholarship to USM

**Skills**

- Knowledge of word processing programs
- Ability to utilize the world wide web for research
- Experience with social research design and implementation
- Familiarity with public speaking



ABSTRACT

PERSPECTIVES ON BLACK-WHITE INTERRACIAL RELATIONSHIPS IN THE  
SOUTH

AUGUST 2002

CELESTE ANDRIA WHEAT

B.A. UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

M.A. GEORGIA SOUTHERN

Directed by: Professor Peggy G. Hargis

By analyzing 12 in-depth interviews with individuals who live in the South Georgia area and who are involved in Black-White interracial relationships, I explain how respondents perceive the appearance of their relationships and how they think others react to their relationships. I also address how the intersection of race and gender affects the interviewees' experiences with family, friends, and strangers. This analysis contributes to current debates about interracial romance by describing how interracial couples experience dating in the South and how race and gender intersects to shape those experiences.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
DEDICATION.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
VITA.....	v
ABTRACT.....	vii
LIST OF TABLES.....	ix
CHAPTER	
I.    Introduction.....	1
II.   Research Methods.....	20
III.  Perspectives .....	24
IV.   Public Response.....	30
V.    Family Response.....	52
VI.   Culture.....	63
VII.  Conclusion .....	67
REFERENCES.....	75
APPENDICES.....	78
APPENDIX A Interview Schedule.....	79
APPENDIX B Institutional Review Board Letter of Approval.....	81

## LIST OF TABLES

	Page
TABLES	
1. List of Interviewees by Race and Gender .....	22
2. Summary of Negative Public Reactions.....	32
3. Typology of Interviewees' Perceptions of <i>Who</i> Responds Negatively to their Interracial Relationship.....	34
4. Family Response.....	53

## Chapter I

### Introduction

Americans' reactions to couples that date across the Black-White color line are mixed. On the one hand, race is considered to be one of the "greatest barriers in marital choice in the U.S." (Heaton & Albrecht, 1996, p.217). This is especially true in the South where dating outside one's race is still regarded, in most communities, as a cultural taboo. Historically, Southerners have severely limited, and in some cases prohibited, interracial relationships by enacting anti-miscegenation laws (Dalmage, 2000). These laws served to regulate Black-White relations by drawing a line in the racial spectrum, defining who was black and who was white. Such hard and fast categories served White's efforts to preserve their myth of *racial purity* (Dalmage, 2000).

On the other hand, recent studies clearly indicate that the "growth in the number of mixed marriages is breaking down - - or at least shifting age-old-barriers" (Heaton & Albrecht, 1996, p.203; Stokes, 1996; Surro, 1999, p. 58). Since the 1967 Supreme Court ruling, *Loving v. Commonwealth of Virginia*, overturned anti-miscegenation laws, interracial marriages have steadily increased (Rosenblatt, Karis, & Powell, 1995). In fact, data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census indicates that the number of Black-White marriages tripled from 1970 to 1990 and nearly quintupled from 1970 to 1994 (Hill & Volker, 2000). Despite these national trends, interracial marriages are less common in the South than in other regions of the country (Heaton & Albrecht, 1996)<sup>i</sup>.

intermarriage (Schuman et al., 1997). In addition, Black families tend to hold more favorable attitudes about their children engaging in interracial relationships, than White families (McNamara, Tempenis, & Walton, 1999).

Finally, perceptions of interracial romance also may depend on whether you are comparing aggregate statistics or asking about *your child*. In the real world, interracial couples must contend with negative reactions not only from routine encounters with strangers in public situations, but also from their families. Parents' primary argument against interracial marriage centers on the fear of societal discrimination against their children and future grandchildren (Burnette, 1995). It is also important to note that some of the families of interracial couples do express support for their children's choice, although the research indicates that a majority of Black-White couples experience negative reactions from family members over the decision to marry across color lines.

Family response is one of the most extensively researched themes within the analysis of interracial relationships. To a large extent, the race of the family is the best predictor of how a family will react to an interracial relationship. As noted above, marked distinctions exist between the ways in which Black and White families respond to an interracial relationship. Black families tend to be more accepting of interracial romance than White families (Dalmage, 2000; Majete, 2000; McNamara, et al., 1999; Rosenblatt et al., 1995; Schuman et al., 1997). The findings from Schuman et al.'s (1997) analysis of White and Black racial attitudes from the 1960s to the late 1990s reveal that Black approval has always been strikingly greater than White approval ratings. Clayton Majete (2000) documents that nearly three-fourths of the 200 Black-White interracial couples that he interviewed report that their families did not have any problems in response to



their relationship. Similarly, McNamara et al. (1999) and Rosenblatt et al. (1995) also note a pattern of greater acceptance from the Black partner's family.

In their book *Multiracial Couples*, Rosenblatt et al. (1995), offer two explanations as to why there is a difference between Black and White family responses to interracial romance, which they uncovered during the process of conducting 21 in-depth, face-to-face interviews with Black-White couples in the Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota area. They explain that Black families tend to be more accepting of the Black partner's interracial relationship than White families because of Black family structure. First, the authors acknowledge that scholars of the Black family have observed that *who* is defined as family, is not necessarily blood kin (Rosenblatt et al., 1995, p.100). People in the Black community often experience close ties to what is known as *play kin*, which are those individuals who are not related through blood, marriage or adoption. Since Black families are more accepting of blood and fictive kin they are also more accepting of, or at least not openly opposed to, the interracial relationship<sup>1</sup>. Second, the authors note that the mother tends to play a much more central role within the Black family structure. The respondents in Rosenblatt's et al. (1995) study note that they valued their mother's opinion of their relationship above that of fathers, or extended kin, such as aunts, uncles or cousins. Also a greater number of the Black respondents in the study report being raised in single parent homes by their mothers. Therefore, the authors assert that in Black families the mother has a much greater role in accepting or rejecting the interracial

---

<sup>1</sup> Rosenblatt et al. (1995) note that other studies including: (Golden, 1994; Kouri & Lasswell, 1993; Porterfield, 1978,p.116) have all found Black families to be more accepting than White families of interracial relationships, due to the way in which they define the Black family structure.

relationship, in comparison to White families, where fathers are much more influential figures. Rosenblatt et al. (1995, p. 118) offer the following analysis:

If women respond more often with openness and efforts to relate and less often with prejudice to the relationship choices of sons and daughters, then the fact that the crucial person in Black families is often a woman means there may be more acceptance of a family member's entree into an interracial couple.

The authors add that since Black families tend to be more open to who is considered kin, then they may be more likely to accept the White partner into the family structure.

McNamara et al. (1999) report that often the families of Black partners are not shocked over the interracial relationship, particularly if there have been instances of other interracial or intercultural relationships in the family already. They note that although Black families tend to be initially more accepting than White families it does not necessarily mean that they are supportive of the relationship. McNamara et al. (1999) found in the interviews that they conducted, that the majority of Black families did accept the interracial relationship, but were not supportive of the couples. According to the authors, Black families were accepting of the interracial relationship on the surface, but interviewees described a sense of *veiled opposition* from Black family members. Veiled opposition is often a sense of unease that couples feel from Black family members, which is accompanied by an uncertainty as to what is behind the veiled opposition. This lack of support can contribute to hostility and tensions among the family members of different races.

Rosenblatt et al. (1995) argue that a mix of acceptance and rejection of an interracial relationship frequently characterizes White family reactions to interracial romance, often with one member of the immediate family showing acceptance, while other family members tend to disapprove of the relationship. Majete's (2000, p.11) research with Black-White couples also supports Rosenblatt et al.'s (1995) findings that reactions from White families tend to be mixed, and offers the following example of this trend: "a White mother who told her daughter to consider the effect such a relationship would have on her children...but the father had no problems." Drawing from interviews with interracial couples, researchers have noted that initially White families are less accepting of the interracial relationship, but over time they came to a modest degree of acceptance (Majete 2000; McNamara et al. 1999; Rosenblatt et al. 1995). Majete (2000) reports that in the majority of cases where there were mixed reactions that the family becomes more accepting over time.

Why is it the case that White families tend to harbor greater opposition to their family member's interracial relationship? Rosenblatt et al. (1995, p.72) articulates that the language of White opposition is based on the White families' concerns over "societal, community, neighborhood, or family disapproval; issues of safety and well-being; the alleged clannishness of African Americans; problems the children would have; the likelihood of a poor economic future; and 'problems' (with problems not named)." McNamara et al. (1999) agree that these underlying reasons, which were noted by Rosenblatt et al. (1995) can be viewed as the White families' attempt to save their families from the perceived loss of status, caused by societal racism. McNamara et al.

(1999) argue that racism is often at the heart of the negative feelings about interracial relationships.

Interestingly, gender comes into play in the family dynamics between fathers and daughters of White families. Rosenblatt et al. (1995) point out that in their study there is a pattern of White families being more protective of daughters and perhaps not only to protect, but also to control their choices. The authors observe that in nearly all the cases involving White women, there was opposition to the interracial relationship. Rosenblatt et al. (1995) speculate that with fathers playing a much more central role in the White family, along with siblings, grandparents and other relatives, it may be that when several family members are likely to disapprove, the odds of family opposition for the White partner are increased. The authors assert that the different responses to the interracial relationship in Black and White families stem from the Black mother's central role in the family. Rosenblatt et al. (1995) and other researchers, such as McNamara et al. (1999) and Majete (2000) have all made significant contributions to the study of interracial relationships, by delving further into the family responses of Black versus White families. Their body of research, however, still fails to give an in-depth analysis of the ways in which gender affects the family's response to interracial romance. Several questions remain, including the role of the mother in the White family. How did she feel about the interracial relationship? Were there differences in the mother's and father's responses to the interracial relationship? More importantly, how did the White participant perceive his or her mother's or father's reaction?

How the public reacts to interracial couples is a major theme in the research literature on interracial romance. Discussions about how the public reacts are not only

prevalent in the research literature, but it has also been a topic of popular media, such as the 1967 classic, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, and the more recent Black-White interracial romance film, *Save the Last Dance*. Popular media, such as these films, depict the issues that Black-White couples face in the public sphere. The notoriety of these films illustrates public awareness and their reaction to the problems interracial couples face in real life. When considering public reactions, it is important to examine what types of reactions couples receive, from whom the reactions are coming from, and how the couples cope with negative experiences.

For most Black-White couples, public reactions come in the form of what Rosenblatt et al. (1995) term *casual encounters*, which may include stares, words or gestures from strangers in public, or poor service in restaurants. Research suggests that the majority of Black-White couples in the United States report that *stares* are the most common reaction from strangers in routine public situations (McNamara et al., 1999; Rosenblatt et al., 1995). McNamara et al. (1999) found this to also be true of Black-White interracial couples in the South. Out of the 28 Black-White couples they interviewed in the South Carolina area, the majority noted that the most typical reactions to their relationship were stares (McNamara et al., 1999). The underlying motives behind stares range from curiosity to hostility toward interracial romance (Rosenblatt et al., 1995). Although most couples only contend with casual encounters, there are some cases of more extreme reactions. Although the more extreme forms of societal racism are rare, some interracial couples have encountered hate mail, phone calls, literature, and in some cases, physical threats and attacks (McNamara et al., 1999; Rosenblatt et al., 1995). Research also suggests that some interracial couples encounter various forms of



institutional racism. Rosenblatt et al. (1995, p.140) claim that “institutional racism is racism that is supported overtly and covertly by a substantial institution: a business, a labor union, the government, or a university.” For example, some of the couples in Rosenblatt et al.’s study reported that some preachers interpreted certain scriptures as “divine opposition to interracial relationships” (Rosenblatt et al, 1995, p.143). In order to better understand societal discrimination and institutional racism toward Black-White interracial couples, it is necessary to look at which groups tend to react more negatively to couples.

Given the historical legacy of Black-White interracial romance often conjures emotional responses from both Black and White Americans. Research suggests that Black females, in particular, have a difficult time dealing with Black-White interracial couples. There has been a great deal written about the resentment Black women feel toward White women who are involved with Black men. (See Dalmage, 2001, p.58; Rosenblatt et al., 1995, p.149-157; Staples 1981,p.148-151). Rosenblatt et al. (1995, pp.150-151) explain that Black women resent the loss of Black men to White women for the following reasons:

For more than 50 years, there have been more single women in the Black community than single men. Moreover, the many factors blocking substantial numbers of Black men from earning a decent wage have markedly decreased the pool of Black men whose earnings make them viable partners by their own or by a Black woman’s standards (Dickson, 1993). So one might well imagine why a Black woman who would like to be married might be upset when a Black man who is earning a decent living marries a White woman...Some may see the higher

rates of interracial marriage by Black men as a rejection of personal identity, as a rejection of Black women's beauty...or as a betrayal of the Black community.

Similarly, Sharon Bohn Gmelch (1998) also discusses the resentment that Black women feel toward Black-White interracial relationships, in her book *Gender on Campus: Issues for College Women*. She notes that for Black women on college campuses the issue of interracial dating is a very sensitive subject. It's not widely discussed, but there is a preference known as the *color complex*, which idealizes lighter skin and European physical characteristics. Gmelch (1998, p.105) explains that "many Black women believe that interracial dating shows that Black men have accepted Euro centric standards of beauty--light skin, straight hair, fine features--and rejected those of their own race." Although negative reactions come from both the Black and White community alike, the Black female response is discussed most frequently in the literature.

Root's (2000) interviews with Black-White multiracial families also support Gmelch's (1998) research concerning Black females' resentment of the idealization of Euro centric beauty. She notes that the resentment Black women often feel toward interracial romance, is also felt by many Black men. She explains that for both Black women and men, there is a feeling of rejection when they see an interracial couple, but for different reasons. Root (2000) describes these differences between Black female and Black male resentment in the following:

In a society in which women's worth is judged largely by beauty—more specifically, Euro centric standards of beauty—Black women are presumed to be the farthest removed from such a standard. Men's worth is judged largely by their educational and occupational status, two primary areas in which Black men are

undermined by a racist system. Black men with few educational and job opportunities lack status in the marriage market. Thus, when Black men see a Black woman with a White man, they may be reminded of the numerous ways in which the White-supremacist system had denied them opportunities. The privilege and power granted to Whites, particularly to White males, is paraded in front of them, and they see the Black women in these relationships as complicit with the oppressor (pp.58-59).

Beyond the gendered responses to Black women and Black men to Black male-White female interracial relationships, Rosenblatt et al., (1995) observed a distinct sense of concern within the Black community to Blacks joining with the “oppressor” (p.155). They explain “a major factor in that concern is the feeling that it is inappropriate to choose as a partner somebody from the group that has been oppressing African Americans” (Rosenblatt et al., 1995, p.155).

Although the reactions from the Black community, particularly Black females, are commonly noted in the literature on interracial romance, certain members of the White community are also responsible for the negative reactions that some Black-White couples experience in public situations. In Sheryline A. Zebroski ‘s (1999) article *Black-White Intermarriages: The Racial and Gender Dynamics of Support and Opposition*, she surveyed 50 Black female-White male couples, and 50 Black Male-White female couples in order to explore what types of casual contacts were most supportive of their relationship and which casual contacts were the most opposed to their relationship. The respondents in her study noted that White men (28%) were the most opposed to Black-White interracial relationships, followed by 27% of Black women, and lagging just

behind Black women, were Black men (25%). Interestingly, Zebroski's (1999) research reveals that White men and Black women were more likely than Black men to be opposed to their relationship, and both Black men and White women were more likely to report that White men were the most opposed to their relationship (pp.129-130).

Other important factors to take into account when examining White attitudes towards Black-White couples are age and education. Deborah S. Wilson's and Cardell K. Jacobson's examination of variables such as education and age using data from the General Social Survey (GSS), data collected by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, indicates that one's education and age were significant variables in predicting who was more or less tolerant of interracial relationships (Wilson & Jacobson, 1995). They assert that education and age were good predictors of racial tolerance toward interracial couples in the following:

First, the older people are, the less accepting they are of interracial marriage; second, age can also be a cohort effect: the older groups have lived during the times of a harsher race problem. As young people attend college and meet people of all different races, cultures, and backgrounds, they become more aware of and better educated about racial problems. As exposure increases, tolerance does also. (Wilson & Jacobson, 1995, p.363).

Although it has been noted that older Whites, and those with less education tend to be less tolerant of other races, it is interesting to point out that research has also found that young White fraternity and sorority membership is a predictor of less tolerant racial attitudes (Morris, 1991; Muir, 1991; Wood and Chessser, 1994). Specifically Donal E. Muir (1991) noted in his article *White Fraternity and Sorority Attitudes toward 'Blacks'*

*on a Deep South Campus* that in the questionnaires that were given to fraternity and sorority members on the University of Alabama campus that they tended to be considerably more racist than non-Greek affiliates. He attributes the increased prejudicial attitudes of Greeks to the recruitment of students who already hold prejudicial views, which are then reinforced by the particular sorority and/or fraternity culture (Muir, 1991). More specifically, Morris (1991) found that among the sorority and fraternity members he questioned that they tended to be more opposed to interracial marriages, than non-Greeks.

White women tend to be the exception to the rule. Interracial couples perceive White women as the most supportive and least likely to oppose interracial coupling. Zebrowski's (1999) data analysis indicated that White women (24%) were perceived as most supportive of interracial relationships. It is also important, however, to take into consideration how interracial couples deal with negative responses from these groups.

Given the pervasiveness of racism, interracial couples are forced to find a way to cope with negative reactions in public situations. McNamara et al. (1999) explain that for the couples that they interviewed in the South, there are several commonly used techniques for managing societal racism. One of the most common ways that the couples in this study dealt with the less threatening types of responses, such as stares or negative comments, was to simply ignore them. Others used a strategy closely related to ignoring, which was dismissing the importance of the negative reactions. Dismissing means simply not responding to stares, and dismissing them as insignificant. Another very common means of coping with negative responses is by relying on religion. The authors assume that the region probably played a role in determining which respondents were



likely to rely on their faith to cope with negative reactions (McNamara et al., 1999). The authors see region as an important factor since the study took place in the South, which is commonly known as the “bible belt”. The authors also contend that other coping skills involved a sense of humor, reliance on support groups, and in some cases, withdrawing from social interaction (McNamara et al., 1999). The authors remark that “the most dramatic response, and also the least frequently employed by couples, is to confront the people who present the problem and to make them justify their actions (McNamara et al., 1999, p.118).” The authors also found that one of the most revealing aspects of their interviews with Black-White couples in the South was that their reactions seem to balance each other out. For example, if one of the partners was confrontational over a negative response, the other tended to respond more passively, and just ignore the negative response. Although McNamara et al. (1999) found that couples tend to respond differently, they failed to evaluate if gender was a factor in the way that couples respond to negative reactions. For instance, is there a pattern in which women tend to respond more passively, and men more aggressively? For Rosenblatt et al. (1995) in the interviews they conducted with 21 Black-White couples in the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area, they summed up these respondents’ means of defending and coping with societal racism in the following:

They talked about isolating themselves from others, about trying to shut out racism by not noticing it, about minimizing it when they did notice it, and about being careful about where they went. A few people talked about warning others that they were in an interracial couple. Most talked about being selective about the people with whom they interacted and about efforts to find relatively tolerant

communities. Although people might not enjoy confronting racism and might work hard to avoid getting into situations in which confrontation seemed necessary, some said that confrontations was one of the ways that they dealt with racism (p.177).

There is a common thread found throughout studies, -- couples try to react passively to negative responses, by ignoring, or minimizing them. Black-White couples not only contend with family response, and public reactions, but also often contend with cultural differences.

Often, as a result of segregation and different life experiences, Blacks and Whites may have different cultural traditions. These differences may pose a challenge for couples from different backgrounds. Some interracial couples experience a sense of culture shock in their romantic relationship. For some, these cultural differences are seen as a *blessing* while for others they prove to be a source of *conflict*. Erin Burnette (1995) found that such cultural differences include disparities in how we raise children, language, or what we eat, and in some cases differences in values and religious beliefs also exist. She maintains that these differences can sometime cause a strain on interracial relationships.

Others see the melding of two cultures as a positive aspect of interracial romance. Scott London (2000), the host of *Insight and Outlook*, a syndicated cultural affairs radio program and the author of the article *Interracial Marriage Is a Step Toward a More Integrated Culture*, asserts that “never before have so many different traditions, beliefs, and values been integrated into one single culture (p.12).” He acknowledges that some find all of the “platitudes about melting pots, mosaics, and rainbow coalitions,” which

many regard as the “browning of America,” to be a disturbing trend (pp.25-26). But London (2000) argues, “as I see it, the mingling and the mixing of race is a signal that we are evolving toward a higher, more integrated state as a culture” (pp.26-29). Many Black-White interracial couples would agree with London’s commentary.

Rosenblatt et al. (1995) found in the interviews that they conducted with Black-White couples, that the differences were actually *special blessings*. The authors summarized the special blessings as follows:

*Healing*—healing individual wounds from racism and healing wounds in society that have been caused by racism; (b) *enrichment*—the enrichment of self, partner, and children that comes from the joining of groups, or perspectives, of cultures; (c) *weathering racist opposition*—as individual and couple, getting past racist opposition and getting to better places with members who had opposed the relationship (Rosenblatt et al., p.262).

In conclusion, from a review of the literature on interracial romance it is clear that there are three major themes that are central to the lives of Black-White interracial couples. These include, how the couple’s family responds to their relationship, how the public reacts to seeing them together, and the cultural issues that arise when two people who come from different backgrounds are romantically involved. Although, the number of interracial relationships in the U. S. is on the rise, these three issues remain at the heart of the scholarly discourse on interracial romance, and each will be discussed in detail in the following chapters.

At first glance the literature on interracial romance seems to be replete with misconceptions and contradictions. For example, the trend that inter-group marriages are

becoming increasingly more common and accepted appears to be at odds with findings that report that Black-White couples encounter less acceptance than, say, Asian and White couples. But upon closer inspection, these seemingly contradictory findings and trends are less so. The patterns and trends discussed in the literature are very much dependent on race, region, and gender. By examining the day-to-day realities of interracial couples, I will help clarify what others have found, clear up misconceptions, and hopefully, uncover details that have been overlooked by others.

## **Chapter II**

### **Research Methods**

This research explored the dating experiences of Black-White interracial couples living in the Statesboro, Georgia area. The criteria for participant eligibility included any persons 18 years of age and older, who considered themselves to be involved in a Black-White heterosexual interracial relationship. Anyone dating or married was eligible to participate, regardless of the length of time the couple had been together. Also persons who had previously dated interracially, but were not currently in an interracial relationship were eligible to participate.

The study targeted students attending Georgia Southern University, a mid-sized public, southern, regional university with an enrollment of slightly more whites (68%) than blacks (27%), and a gender ratio of 55 percent female to 45 percent male population. The study population was solicited by posting flyers and making announcements in sociology classes. Additional respondents were also solicited through a snowball sampling method, in which each subject interviewed was asked to suggest additional people for interviewing. The snowball sampling method is based on the idea that members of a particular target population, who might be a particularly difficult population to locate, know one another, and therefore can provide the researcher with additional members of that target population (Singleton & Straits, 1999).

Two of the respondents found out about the study from announcements made in their sociology class. Ten others responded to flyers that were posted at various

locations on the GSU campus. In all, 12 respondents were interviewed in this study. The snowball sampling method was not successful in generating any participants for this study.

Of the 12 volunteers, six were White females, three were Black females, two were White males, and one was a Black male. Interviewees are listed in Table 1 by pseudonym, race, and gender. Study participants were interviewed at a location of their choosing. All respondents were given the opportunity to self-identify their own race. One of the participants self-identified as Bi-racial, identifying as a Black person interracial dating someone White. No same-sex couples were interviewed. Of the participants who responded to the study, only one couple was interviewed, and chose to be interviewed at the same time. All other participants interviewed individually and their partners were not interviewed. The length of time couples reported being together, ranged from three months to seven years, with 8 of the 12 of participants claiming to have dated their partner for only several months. Nine of 12 respondents were currently Georgia residents, and all respondents had dated interracial in Georgia. Participants' ages ranged from 19 to 27, with the average mean age of the interviewee being 22. Participants were well-educated, with 11 of the 12 respondents currently pursuing a college education, ranging from college freshman to first year graduate student. Given that the majority of participants in this study are in college and have not yet entered into full time careers, questions were not asked about social class.

Table 1. List of Interviewees by Race and Gender.

Name	Race	Gender
Anna	Black	Female
Tamara	Black	Female
Maryanne	Black	Female
Katherine	White	Female
Rhonda	White	Female
Summer	White	Female
Lori	White	Female
Beverly	White	Female
Pamela	White	Female
Nick	White	Male
Wade	White	Male
Cecil	Black (Bi-racial)	Male

All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Subjects were assigned pseudonyms and written transcripts contain only the subject's pseudonyms. The confidentiality of data was maintained by keeping all tapes of interviews in a locked file at the researcher's home. Subjects were given an informed consent form. The informed consent form served to make subjects aware of the purpose of the study, inform the subjects that the interviews were audio taped, and describe the nature of the research and tell of possible benefits and risks. The respondents were also given and signed a copy of this form for their personal records. All questions were open-ended and the interviews lasted anywhere within the time frame from half an hour to an hour and a half.

The open-ended questions focused on the couples' relationship history, family and friends' responses, encounters with strangers in public places, societal perceptions of his or her relationship, and the ways in which each individual perceived their interracial relationship. At the close of each interview, the respondents were also asked a few miscellaneous questions that refer back to comments made during the interview (e.g. for

what are some of the positive and negative aspects of being in an interracial relationship). Respondents were also asked if there were any questions that were not asked that they felt were important for the researcher to know (See attached interview schedule in Appendix A).

The data was then analyzed to find similarities and differences in the couples' experiences. Next, line- by-line coding was done to create a master list of all key words. The words were then grouped into thematic categories. By implementing this technique, dominant themes throughout the text were identified. Once the dominant themes were identified, I was able to determine if the experiences of those involved in Black-White interracial relationships in the South Georgia area tended to follow the national statistics, trends, and patterns that have been consistently documented in the existing literature on Black-White romantic relationships, and also evaluate new themes and issues. From the data analysis, four major thematic categories emerged, which included *perspectives*, *public reactions*, *family response* and *cultural issues*. Each theme will be addressed in the following chapters.



## **Chapter III**

### **Perspectives**

In the following three chapters, individuals involved in a Black-White romance discuss how they see their relationship, how they think their family views it, how strangers react to it, and how they think the cultural differences in their relationship effects it. In this chapter, however, respondents revealed how they think others see their relationship and how that affects them.

Respondents were asked to describe their perceptions of how others viewed their interracial relationship. All of the respondents seemed to feel that most of the people that they were the closest to, whether friends and/or family members were accepting of their relationship, but acknowledged that not everyone they came into contact with did.

Tamara exemplified this sentiment in the following description.

If I were to talk about my boyfriend's work buddies that I have met...I think that they are accepting of it...I think they really do not have a problem with it. Now if I were to say how other people around campus perceive it...I am sure that some people are uncomfortable with it, and I know a lot of Black people do not like it.

In the cases where interviewees spoke about negative reactions from friends and family, they often said that they did not care what others thought about their relationship.

Tamara, for instance, remarked, "I really do not think about it because it does not matter to me what they think." Summer, a White woman dating a Black man, shares Tamara's sentiment. She said, "I do not think about it, because I am just living my life for myself

and nobody else. I do not even worry about what other people think.” Wade, a White male, commented that most of his closest friends were accepting, but that he had little concern for what others think.

My friends do not care. To my friends, all they see is that Wade and Cleo are dating. As for everybody else...I do not care, because they are not me. They are not going to influence my life and they are not going to change my way of thinking. If I run into somebody in an everyday situation and they say “I disagree with you, you are wrong for doing that” it does not matter because at the end of the day, I am still going to be with the person that I love.

All of the participants, however, expressed at some point in the interview that certain members of society do not view their relationship in a positive light. Lori in particular felt that society at large disapproved of interracial relationships. She explained, “I think some people definitely think, why are they not with someone of their own race? I think, they always think, there has to be a reason . . . it just cannot be like, oh these two people really like each other.” Katherine agreed that, “There are still people out there that do not like it but you cannot help who you care about.” Nick, a White male, also acknowledged that there are some members of society who disapprove of his relationship. He claimed, “Well, I think [some] people do not seem to like it and then some people do not care as long as we are happy.” Nick perceived that “people from small towns and older people do not want to see us together.” Tamara, a Black woman, thinks Southerners in general disapprove

There are certain areas of the world, in the South, where they still have that small mind mentality, or it is just that they do not want to change. I have noticed that

people in the South do not like change. They like their set ways, their traditions, and it is going to take a while for the South to completely give in to it and just let go of the fact that there is a difference in color and skin.

Lori agreed that there is still a social stigma surrounding interracial romance.

In general, I think society still has a problem with it. I really do not think it is that well accepted. I still think that people are a lot more comfortable if you stay in your own race and I do not know if it is ever going to be as common as dating within your own race. I guess you could say it is just not the preferred way.

Anna also perceived that society is still not accepting of her choice to date interracially. She explained that “the really ignorant people are more like ‘why can’t you not date your own race?’ and it’s like, are they that boring or have they not assimilated so much that they cannot date their own race, quote unquote.” All the respondents seemed to agree that there were some people who approved of their interracial relationship, particularly those closest to them, such as friends and family. At the same time, at some point during their interview, they acknowledged that there were some who disagreed with their choice to date interracially. All respondents sensed a mix of reactions, both approving and disapproving, regardless of their race or gender.

How does society, at large, view interracial romance? Are attitudes towards interracial romance changing? Respondents were questioned about both of these issues, in order to examine how they perceived the social climate toward interracial romance in the United States. Despite some of the respondents’ perceptions of societal disapproval of their relationship all agreed that they perceived a trend toward greater societal

acceptance of Black-White interracial relationships. Nick remarked, “I think it is changing slowly, but surely...” Tamara also had an upbeat interpretation.

I feel that in this day and age, that people are more open towards it and that they have seen it a lot more in the movies and the media, [which] has a huge [influence] on it. They are more used to the situation.

Summer agreed that the social climate is better, saying, “ I think that it is getting better. I think that people are being more lenient with it now than before...”

Americans generally view the United States as a *melting pot*, where groups from different ethnic and racial backgrounds come together to create a blend of American values, ideals, and culture (London, 1998; Macionis, 1999). Several of the participants in this study reiterated this ideology and commented on how they believed there has been a shift towards greater societal acceptance of interracial relationships over the years. For instance, Anna argued, “Society is a lot more accepting because [interracial relationships] are a lot more common place now. America has become such a melting pot, that interracial couples have become normal.” Wade enthusiastically shared the feeling that perceptions toward interracial romance are improving.

Oh yeah, it is becoming more acceptable. People’s outlook on life, people’s moral decisions, [and] people’s values are all changing. I feel that it is just the broadening of the mind and finding out that people are just people. Racism is going to be gone later down the road. Probably not in my life time...but it is going to be gone sooner or later because in America we have always been the melting pot of society. It is like we are stirring the pot again. Once the zebra babies start coming out, then, once it starts becoming more and more acceptable

to date outside of your race...it is going to start all blending together again and ...no one is going to be able to say I am truly Black [or] I am truly White.

Cecil and Rhonda, echoed Wade's view that society is becoming more accepting due to a greater prevalence of racial mixing.

I think it is becoming more accepted and you see more children produced [from] interracial relationships, so it is just becoming more of a melting pot... I think that there is going to come a time real soon when everyone is just conglomerating and it is going to be real hard to tell who is who.

Cecil added:

It is the Browning of America. It is not Black and it is not White, it is Brown, especially in a state like California... You know you fall in love and you have children. You do not have time to decide, wait a minute, this is the wrong colored person for me or this is the wrong skin tone. You are always going to have ignorance. You are always going to have some stereotypes and insecurities but the closer people come to that middle ground and away from those two ends of the spectrum...the more tolerant, the more able they will be to share their foods, their heritages, and their cultures...[and] come together and create a good utopian society.

### *Summary and Conclusion*

When it comes to the interviewees' views on how others members of society view their relationship, all believed that the people they are closest too, perhaps friends or family, were accepting and understanding of their relationship. Given that the participants were drawing from their experiences living in the South, many felt strongly that there

were some members of society that were uncomfortable with their relationship. Tamara exemplified this feeling with the statement “There are certain areas of the world, in the South, where they still have that small mind mentality, or it is just that they do not want to change.”

Participants willingly acknowledged that although some accept their relationship, there were still others who disapproved of their relationship. All of the respondents agreed that attitudes toward Black-White romance are changing. Summer expressed that “...it is getting better.” Most participants contributed this more favorable shift in racial attitudes to the melting pot ideology, which holds that America is a society with a combination of racial and ethnic backgrounds. Although respondents contributed the shift toward greater societal acceptance to the melting pot ideology, it has been documented that this concept is used to describe what is actually the process of *assimilation* (Macionis, 1999). Assimilation describes the process in which minorities take on the patterns of the dominant culture. For example, adopting the same language, food preferences, religion or clothes (Macionis, 1999).

The respondents’ perceptions seemed to accurately reflect current findings about attitudes toward interracial romance. Numerous scholars have documented that attitudes about Black-White couples have improved over time (Dalmage, 2000; McNamara, et al., 1999; Root, 2001, Rosenblatt et al., 1995; Schuman, 1997). Although there was an overall increase in favorable attitudes toward interracial relationships, it is important to keep in mind that region still remains an important predictor of racial attitudes, with those living in the Southern regions tending to lag behind the North in issues related to racial tolerance (Schuman et al., 1997).

## Chapter IV

### Public Response

Negative reactions to interracial couples in routine public situations is an issue that is consistently addressed throughout the literature on interracial romance, and is a central issue of concern for the participants in this study. Ten out of the 12 respondents reported receiving negative reactions to their interracial relationship in public situations. Two of the respondents, Pamela and Beverly, claimed that they have not received any negative public responses to their relationship. When asked why they thought they have not received any negative response, Beverly said that she and her Black boyfriend mostly dated in Atlanta, Georgia, a more urban area. Pamela, on the other hand, felt that she had not received any negative reactions when in public with her Black boyfriend because they always go places in large groups. When discussing negative public reactions to interracial romance it is important to note *whom* the reactions are coming from, *what types* of reactions couples are receiving, and *how* couples deal with these reactions.

In this study respondents reported a range of societal reactions to their relationships. The ones that had reported negative public reactions to their interracial relationships were asked to describe their experience. Stares were the most commonly reported reaction that interracial couples have received in public situations. Specifically, 10 of the 12 respondents reported receiving stares from strangers. Tamara said that when

she is with her boyfriend in public “that it is typically kind of common to get those weird kind of looks.” Wade, a White male noticed that “people stare and people point and whisper” when he is with his girlfriend in public. Anna, a Black female also noticed, “you get whispers and you get looks and like ‘why are you dating him?’” Lori agreed that the most typical reaction that she and her Black boyfriend receive while in public situations is stares. She described these public reactions with the following: “Just kind of looking, stares, and I have even seen people listen in on your conversation just to see how you interact with each other.” She explained, “It is very rare that people say anything and definitely not to your face, but definitely I would say that everywhere you go people look.” Summer, reiterated Lori’s sentiments with the following reply, “people just stare [and] really that is all they do because no one is ever going to say anything.” Katherine, a White woman, who is dating a Black man, also reported receiving stares while in public arenas, and noticed that “if you see Mexican and White [couple], [people] do not stare as hard at you as if you were a Black and White couple.” The stares that the respondents in this study have experienced are not uncommon. The research on interracial romance suggests that stares are the most common reaction that interracial couples receive (McNamara et al., 1995).



Table 2. Summary of Negative Public Reactions.

Interviewee	Race/ Gender	Type of Public Reaction	Interviewees' General Response to Negative Reactions
Maryanne	B/F	Stares	Brushes off
Tamara	B/F	Stares/Comments	Brushes off
Anna	B/F	Stares/Comments	Ignore
Cecil	B/M	Stares/Comments	Stare Back
Nick	W/M	Stares/Comments	Laugh/Confront
Wade	W/M	Stares	Confront
Rhonda	W/F	Stares	Ignore
Summer	W/F	Stares	Brushes off
Lori	W/F	Stares/Comments	Ignore
Katherine	W/F	Stares	Ignore
Pamela	W/F	None	N/A
Beverly	W/F	None	N/A

The second most common reaction couples face was negative comments, with 5 of the 12 participants reported to have received negative comments in public situations, with none of the respondents reported experiencing any type of physical violence or threats of violence in response to their relationship. Lori, a White woman who is dating a Black man, told that she and her boyfriend have overheard strangers making comments about them while out together. She explained “I have been in some situations where they will say stuff under their breath...for example at the movies one time [someone said]... ‘I do not know how her mother lets her do that!’ ” Lori goes on to describe other comments that she and her boyfriend have received, “I will be out with my boyfriend,

and somebody will say something like ‘he has got jungle fever’ or ‘you could not find a Black girl?’” Along the same lines, Tamara has experienced negative comments when in public with her boyfriend, she tells that “I will be walking on campus with my boyfriend and a group of guys in the corner will be like ‘oh why is she with him?’” Anna, a Black female who has also experienced negative comments, informs that “you get used to some of the stares and some of the comments that get thrown at you from time to time.” It is not surprising that the majority of couples in this study who have dated interracially in the South have experienced negative public reactions to their relationship. The research literature suggested that societal racism is one of the greatest obstacles that Black-White couples face (McNamara et al., 1999; Rosenblatt et al.). This is particularly true of the South, where racial attitudes tend to be less tolerant than in Northern regions (Schuman et al., 1998). With the legacy left behind by the South’s contentious racial history, clearly there is still some opposition to interracial romance that persists. It is not only important to look at what types of reactions couples are receiving, but also to look at *who* the responses are coming from. Table 3 lists the respondents along with their race and gender in parenthesis and whom they perceive to respond the most negatively to their relationship.

Table 3. Typology of Interviewees' perceptions of *who* responds negatively to their interracial relationship.

Interviewee	Persons responding negatively			
	Black Females	Black Males	White Males	Older White Couples
Maryanne (B/F)	x			
Tamara (B/F)	x	x	x	x
Anna (B/F)	x	x	x	
Cecil (B/M)	x		x	x
Nick (W/M)	x	x		x
Wade (W/M)		x		
Rhonda (W/F)			x	x
Summer (W/F)	x			x
Lori (W/F)	x	x		
Katherine (W/F)	x	x		x
Pamela (W/F)				
Beverly (W/F)				

In this study 10 out of the 12 respondents noted that they have received negative reactions in routine public situations. Of the nine respondents who have experienced negative public reactions, six of them said that the most negative public reactions had come from Black women. Tamara, a Black female dating a White male explained that her friends' initial reaction to the news that she was dating a White man were as follows: "my Black female friends have been like, 'what is up with that Tamara?'" [The] initial reaction from my friends down here (Statesboro, GA), [were] that they really didn't like it too much..." Tamara went on to talk about how Black females have responded in routine public situations when she has been with her White boyfriend, "we get more comments from [Black] males and more looks from [Black] females." When asked why she thought that more Black males and females have responded negatively to her interracial relationship, she responded with the following explanation:

Back to the media again, I see on movies and things like that when a Black person might make a comment on an interracial relationship. Just not too long ago, the movie *Save the Last Dance*... [in] movies like they will (Black females) make a comment like saying that “White women should stay in their own relationships” and that “there are not enough good Black men around and when one comes along then a White woman comes and steals him away,” and that is so stupid.

Anna, a Black female told about a negative encounter that she had when driving with her White boyfriend in Savannah, “up in Savannah a carload drove by and they were like, ‘you know they don’t like niggers’, which was fun to say the least.” Lori, a White female tells how her boyfriend’s family treated her, “Sometimes one of my boyfriend’s sisters would be like ‘it is the White girl again’ (she laughs), and stuff like that, and his cousins would make fun of me.” Lori further explained how Black females have reacted to her and her Black boyfriend in public situations:

I have had [Black] females just be like “look at her with him” [and] “they are [White women] always taking our men.” That happens quite often, they will make a lot of comments and they are like “that is why [we] cannot find any good men. To me that is really scary because I do not want to get jumped by a big group of [Black] girls. ...As far as hurtful comments and as far as things that will actually scare you, I think Black females, because they can get really hostile about that, just because they think that he (her Black boyfriend) [thinks he] is too good to date [in] his own race. So I guess that might have something to do with it.

Summer, a White female dating a Black male, also encountered a similar reaction from Black females, when out with her Black boyfriend.

Black girls will get on you too. They do not like the fact that [I am dating a Black male], I mean some of them, not all of them. We were walking through the mall in Savannah and girls would be like [staring]. And I would just sit there and look back at them, like what? Black girls will stare, but I guess they are jealous or something. I do not know.

Cecil, a Black male also encountered Black female disapproval when several Black women who he met at a local restaurant found out that he dates White women.

When I first got to town (Statesboro, GA) I was over at Nikko's, a teriyaki place and two Black girls were coming out and I was coming in. They kind of started talking to me...and I told them where I was from [the North] and they were from Georgia and they said "you like those White girls, huh?" And I said, "There is no shame in my game. You know I do not discriminate when it comes to women." [They said] "You better be careful!" ...and something like "give a sister a try or something like that" (he laughs).

Along with Black females, respondents also noticed that Black males also tended to be very vocal in their disapproval of interracial relationships. Interviewees also noted that Blacks in general, were more likely to vocalize their negative reactions in the form of comments, than Whites. Tamara, a Black female dating a White male, shared a negative public reaction that she has experienced from Black males.

...Believe it or not, I get more of a bad vibe from Black people. I will be walking around campus with my boyfriend you will [and] hear a group of guys, black guys, over in the corner and they will be like "oh, what is she doing with him?" Or you know the same thing from the Black females.

Tamara further added that from her perspective, males tend to make more comments about her interracial relationship than females, “We get more comments from males and more looks from females...overall, day-to-day, just to make an average note of it I would say more males would make comments or [give] looks.” Similarly, Nick, a White male dating a Black female, also said that he has received more comments from Black males and more stares from Black females, “Black males as far as like trying to holler at her...and Black women just look at us...they have... never said anything.” When Nick, was asked if he and his girlfriend had ever been in a public situation where he was aware that others noticed him as an interracial couple he responded with the following:

Yeah, there has been plenty of times when me and her might go to the mall or a restaurant and people will look at you...We might be at the mall and there might be a couple of [Black] guys that holler at her. Because I’m not too big and White they may underestimate me [and] think they have the right to holler at her....

Nick also recalled another instance when a Black male tried to flirt with his Black girlfriend, or as he puts it *holler* at her.

I remember one time when she lived in her old apartment and we were getting ready to leave and I had a for sale sign on my car so this [Black] guy came up to her and just started talking to her...I thought he was just there to talk about the car, and then he started to holler at her to get her phone number.

In some cases respondents conveyed that they had received the most negative responses from White males. Most commented that White males would stare, but noted that as a group, White males were less vocal in their disapproval than Black females or

Black males. Lori, a White female dating a Black male commented on her perceptions of White male disapproval in routine public encounters.

I would say as far as more looks and stares I would say [that] primarily White males, ... and they don't say as much. They definitely [give] a lot more stares, look a lot more and talk amongst their friends about it, and you know what they are doing. The runner up to that, who actually will say things to your face [is] Black females.

Clearly the findings for this study revealed that Black females and Black males tend to be more vocal in their responses to interracial relationships. In similar studies, researchers have found more critical reactions from Whites, for instance in Rosenblatt et al.'s (1995) study, the authors note that there were more examples of White racism toward Black-White couples, but at the same time point out that there is a definite feeling of resentment toward interracial romance from the Black community. Perhaps, interviewees received more negative reactions from Black females, and in general more vocal reactions from Blacks because of the historical roots of slavery in the South, which has caused a strong sense of concern that the Black community feels about joining with the *oppressor* (Rosenblatt et al., 1995). Also resentment that Black women feel toward interracial romance has been well documented (Dalmage, 2001; Rosenblatt et al., 1995; Staples 1981). For some Black women, their opposition is linked to the shrinking pool of eligible Black men, and for others it is the rejection of Black women's beauty in exchange for the idealization of Euro centric beauty (Gmelch, 1998; Root, 2000; Rosenblatt et al., 1995). Black men, on the other hand, tend to see interracial relationships, as a reminder that they are still undermined in the racist system, with many Black men possessing fewer

educational and occupational job opportunities, therefore lacking status in the marriage market (Root, 2000).

Several of the respondents also commented on the negative reactions that they have received from White males in fraternities. In all the cases where there were reports of negative response from young White males, the respondents noted that they were fraternity members. Every respondent who noted negative reactions from young White males, were reported to be fraternity members. Tamara, a Black female whose boyfriend is White, shared her experience going to a fraternity party with her boyfriend.

...We were all heading to this [fraternity] party and so I walk in and I am holding my boyfriend's hand and everybody just stops. I mean, literally just stops and turns and looks, and I was like, alright this is great (she says sarcastically and laughs)...I am like oh my god, because it was like they were drinking, talking and laughing [and] I come up the stairs around the corner holding his hand. Then they started talking and stuff again and it was just weird. It was probably one of the most, what is the word, most noticeable things that has happened with us being together.

Cecil, a Black male, and his girlfriend Rhonda have also noticed negative reactions from White male fraternity members. Cecil commented on the stares he and his girlfriend have received:

Most of the time we are together...you get more looks from the frat guys than the White [sorority] girls. I wish they would say something. I wish one of those little frat boys would say something, but [they] just do not seem to have it in them.



Rhonda has also noticed negative reactions from fraternity members.

...On Greek row here and that is all the White sororities and fraternities on that street. Needless to say there is not a lot of Black folk on the street so when he comes over or comes through things have maybe been said or [we have] been stared at.

The respondent's experiences of negative reactions from fraternity members on campus are consistent with the literature on racial attitudes of fraternity and sorority members. Morris (1991), Muir (1991) and Wood and Chesser (1994) have all documented that members of fraternities and sororities tend to hold less racially tolerant attitudes. Specifically, Muir (1991) found that on the Deep South campus of the University of Alabama that Greeks tended to be considerably more racist than non-Greeks. Morris's (1991) study reveals that fraternity and sorority members tend to be more opposed to interracial romance. Muir (1991) attributes the less racially tolerant attitudes of fraternity and sorority members, particularly on the Deep South campus that he evaluated to a recruitment of students who already hold prejudiced beliefs which are reinforced by the fraternity or sorority culture which aides in the perpetration of racism.

In some cases the interviewees noticed that negative public reactions are also dependent on the age of the person that they come into contact with. Many of the participants in this study noted greater societal disapproval of their relationship from members of a White older generation. Of the 10 interviewees who have experienced negative public reactions, half reported receiving negative reactions from members of the older generation, in particular older White couples. Nick, a White male, told that he and his girlfriend have received stares from older White people. He explained, "Especially

older White people look at us like, ‘what are we doing?’” He further shared that those types of reactions “really hurts me because they should mind their own business.” Nick perceived that race plays an important role among the reactions of the older generation, with the statement that “it seems like older Black couples are more accepting than older White couples.” Along the same lines, Cecil and his girlfriend Rhonda, also noticed the negative reactions they have received in public from older individuals.

Cecil explained:

I think we tend to see [negative reactions] a lot more too when we go out to R.J.’s Seafood Restaurant or Franklins Restaurant on Sunday after church and you get the older population there and that is when you tend to get more blatant follow you through the room stares.

Rhonda agreed that these types of reactions are very typical. Being from the mid-west she noted “we have kind of noticed it down here more.” She said that the stares are more noticeable because the older generation tends to hold their stare for a long period of time, rather than just stare and then look away. Similarly Tamara, a Black female, remarked that she also noticed a negative reaction from the older generation. Tamara explained that there are certain places in Statesboro that she felt uncomfortable, due to the presence of the older generation. Tamara stated “I can say that I feel a little apprehensive to go into certain places like down Main Street [in Statesboro].” She particularly felt uncomfortable going to the local pool hall because of the presence of the “*older* generation of Statesboro that is still a little racist.” She remarked, “I pass by places and see rebel flags outside and it’s just like, ooh.”

Other interviewees expressed that there were places they felt uncomfortable going to as an interracial couple. All of the interviewees who experienced negative public reactions to their relationship, also noted particular places they tried to avoid. Three participants said that they would feel uncomfortable taking their partner to their home church. Nick, a White male, explained that he does not feel comfortable taking his Black girlfriend to his hometown church. He said “I have been to Black churches a number of times, but I am just hesitant to take her or a girlfriend of the past to my church, a Baptist church.” Nick hesitates to take a Black date to church with him because “there is a lot of older people there...[and] the only time I have seen Black people at our church is at a funeral or a wedding.” Likewise, Wade, a White male, told that he also did not feel comfortable taking his Black girlfriend with him to his home church.

Wade explained:

Yeah, I would feel uncomfortable taking her back home to where I live and taking her to church. I would feel real uncomfortable with that because where I live in the mountains of North Georgia, unless it has changed, the Black population of that entire county was zero or close to zero at all times. [Black people] were not welcome. It was not like it was written, but it was just one of those things.

Lori, on the other hand, would feel comfortable taking her Black boyfriend to church with her because she goes to a racially integrated church, but she tells that her Black boyfriends did not feel comfortable attending church with her because “they were not used to being in church with White people” because they have always attended *all Black* churches. Four of the participants noted that they felt uncomfortable around fraternity or sorority houses and Greek events. Anna, a Black woman told that she would feel

uncomfortable at a Greek event with the statement, "I would definitely not go to any frat parties or sorority parties."

Nine of the 12 participants noted being in uncomfortable public situations outside of the Georgia Southern University campus. Nick, a White male, told that he has experienced negative public reactions to his relationship outside of campus in the Statesboro area. He said, "Yeah, there has been plenty of times when me and her might go to the mall or a restaurant and people will look at [us]." Cecil reiterated Nick's unease about going to local public places in town. Cecil stated, "I have not been to any of the local bars or taverns. I don't know that I would be totally comfortable with the two of us going out to some local place that I have never been before." He further explained "I am not going to put she or myself in the situation where I have to deal with a conflict." Clearly some of the participants in this study felt uncomfortable in certain public places or assumed they would be uncomfortable at certain public places, and avoided the possibility of societal racism all together by avoiding those particular places. To some degree, avoiding certain public places can be seen as a means of coping with negative reactions.

Interviewees responded to negative reactions from members of the public in a variety of ways. Most of the participants responded to negative reactions by either ignoring the reactions, brushing the reactions off, laughing about the reactions, or in some cases confronting the person(s) who were reacting in a negative manner. All of these responses are typical strategies interracial couples use to cope with negative public reactions, but a new development was found when gender was evaluated in couples' responses.

With the majority of respondents reporting that they have received negative reactions to their relationship in public situations, respondents were asked how they coped with negative public reactions to their relationship and their responses tended to depend on their gender. More passive responses are characteristic of the females interviewed. Three of the females note that they brushed off public stares or comments, and three of the female respondents reported ignoring negative reactions. The males, on the other hand, were more likely to be confrontational in their response to societal disapproval. This was true not only of the males interviewed in this study, but also the majority of female respondents stated that their boyfriends would respond in a more confrontational manner than they would.

Anna, a Black female who has dated White males tells how she coped with negative public responses to her relationships.

...I choose to ignore most of it. [It is] difficult, but you deal. Guys of course are more likely to want to turn around and say something back and it is just like you've got to let it go...Eventually they will forget about it two seconds later and if they do not, as long as they do not come at us, it doesn't really matter.

Likewise, Tamara, a Black woman, whose boyfriend is White, expresses a difference in the way that she and her boyfriend responded to societal disapproval.

He has a harder time dealing with it than I do because to me it is just like their being ignorant. If somebody makes a comment I just brush it off. I am real easy going like that. If anything happens it is just like ok, whatever, it happened, it is done with and I cannot do much about it. He on the other hand, if some guy

makes a comment he is ready to fight them, “what did you say?” I am like “chill out man.” If they want to be ignorant or stupid like that [then] that is fine.

Lori, a White woman, whose boyfriend is Black, also noted how her response to societal disapproval differs from her boyfriend’s.

Me, I do not notice it that much because I have mainly dated interracial. I know two of my previous boyfriends, I was their first interracial relationship [they] ever had and they noticed everything. They picked up on everything and I hardly noticed it.... I ignore it pretty much and then I will forget about it really fast because I understand that a lot of people do not agree with it and a lot of people, it is just something they do not see much of.

Wade, a White male, whose girlfriend is Black, remarked that he deals with negative responses in a confrontational manner.

If somebody is looking at us, or somebody is staring at us as they are walking by me and Cleo, [I] will wave and smile at them. Oh, that unnerves them because they are like, you know what, they are not ashamed of it. [If] people are whispering, I will walk up to somebody and I will be like “you have something to say?” I am a confrontational person.

Wade told about a negative experience he had in Atlanta and explained how he dealt with the situation.

I remember one time I was in Atlanta in a red light district. Myself and my girlfriend were walking down the streets like [about] 10 o’clock at night and this Black guy comes up and hands us a piece of paper and holds out his hand for a donation, and I am like what is this for? He’s like, “it is to stop people like you,”

and I said, “whoa, what did you say?” And he knew I was serious and he said, “No, I was just joking with you.” It is a donation for the Negro college fund or something like that, and I said dude you do not play with stuff like that. I said, “If you play with fire you are going to get burned.”

Cecil, a Black male, also said that he is not afraid to confront someone who responds negatively to he and his White girlfriend. “I stare back. Some people do look at me and I look at them back. I do not have a problem doing that...if they were to make one of those comments, I would be like “wait a minute, you better be careful.”

Male interviewees were found not only to be more confrontational over negative public responses, but also because of negative public reactions to their interracial relationship, show signs of male dominance, in that they feel protective over the women they are dating. Nick, a White male, told of an experience when a Black male tried to pick up his Black girlfriend, while he was with her, he explained “...He started to [flirt] with her to get her phone number...so I had to jump out of the car.” Tamara, a Black female, tells how her White boyfriend also reacted to negative comments in a confrontational manner, “...If some guy makes a comment, he is ready to go fight them.” Wade, a White male, who is in a relationship with a Black female contemplates his future and how he will cope with his father, who may not come to accept his choice to be with a Black woman, and the protective role he felt he must take as a man.

...And if he cannot accept the fact that I love somebody that does not have the same color skin that I do, then I cannot put myself, and at that time my wife and later down the road my children. I cannot put them through that. I have to be a responsible male and take care of mine.

Rhonda, a White female, told how her boyfriend Cecil protects her by being careful of the places that they go on dates.

... We were in Atlanta and [we] were lost needless to say; looking for somewhere to eat and we passed this hole in the wall BBQ place and I was like, let's just go there. I was starving. And he said "I am not going to take my pretty little White girl in there at this time of night."

Cecil explained:

Yeah, I am not going to put myself in the situation where you go to a place ... you go to a Statesboro hang out, not a Georgia Southern [University] hang out [and] the rules change a little bit, as far as how people treat you...I have been invited out to some of the local places in town. I have not been to any of the local bars or taverns. I do not know that I would feel totally comfortable with the two of us going out to some local place that I have never been before. I would want to go somewhere first, myself, to see that I am not going to put her or myself in the situation where I have to deal with a conflict like that.

In previous research it has been noted that interracial couples tend to respond in different ways to societal racism, and these responses tend to balance each other out (McNamara et al., 1999). However, research has failed to evaluate how gender affects couples' responses to negative public reactions. By looking at table three it is clear that males tend to more often respond in a confrontational manner while females tend to respond more passively to negative reactions. This may be attributed to the gendered social roles and ideals that are often expected of men and women in our culture.



Particularly in Southern culture, women are often socialized to be more passive and ladylike, while men are taught to be more assertive and aggressive.

### *Summary and Conclusion*

Although the numbers of interracial relationships are on the rise and researchers point to the trend of increasingly favorable attitudes toward interracial romance, Black-White couples still have to contend with societal discrimination in their daily lives (Dalmage, 2000; McNamara et al., 1999; Schuman et al., 1997; Rosenblatt et al., 1995). The majority of respondents' experiences in the public sphere are in accordance with the interracial romance literature, however, two new developments were found which include: differences in the ways in which males and females responded to negative public reactions and males being protective over their female partner.

First, in examining the findings which were consistent with the research literature, most of the respondents said that the most common public reaction to their relationship were stares, with none of the respondents reporting any type of extreme reactions, such as physical violence. As mentioned in the literature, most Black-White couples reported stares as the most common reaction, while more extreme reactions, such as physical violence was rare (McNamara et al., 1999; Rosenblatt et al., 1995).

Looking at the source of the negative reactions, race and gender greatly affect *who* tends to show societal racism to interracial couples. Nearly all interviewees perceived Black females as the most likely to react negatively to their relationship. Respondents also perceived that Black males, young White male fraternity members, and older couples also tended to respond negatively to interracial couples, but to a noticeably lesser degree than Black females. Research suggests that Black females and White males

tend to be perceived as the most oppositional to interracial romance (Zebroski, 1999). Interestingly, none of the respondents in this study reported any type of negative response from White females, which corresponds with Zebroski's (1999) study, which found that White women were perceived as the most supportive and least oppositional of Black-White couples. Many of the respondents in this study noted that age and race, were factors in determining *who* responded negatively in public situations.

Many of the respondents reported that they have received negative reactions from the older White generation. This finding is not uncommon, the age cohort effect has been noted by researchers as a predictor of racial tolerance, with the younger age cohorts tending to be more tolerant, while the older generations, who have lived during times of heightened racial conflict, tend to be more resistant to interracial couples (Schuman et al., 1997; Wilson & Parker, 1995).

Participants also experienced negative public reactions from young White fraternity members. This finding is not uncommon. According to researchers, White fraternity and sorority members tend to be less racially tolerant due to the types of members recruited and the particular culture of prejudice that these Greek organizations engender, particularly on Southern campuses (Morris, 1991; Muir, 1991; Wood & Chesser, 1994). Also, in each of the categories listed including: Black females, Black males, Older White Couples and White fraternity members, region is also a factor that should be taken into consideration. Research has documented that Southerners tend to be less racially tolerant than persons living in the North, which may also contribute to these groups' negative racial attitudes toward Black-White couples (Root, 2000; Schuman et al., 1997).

Most of the findings throughout the chapter on public response are consistent with the research literature on interracial relationships, however, a new development emerged when evaluating the influence of gender on the ways in which interviewees respond to negative public reactions. Research points to couples dealing with negative reactions using different coping methods (McNamara et al., 1999). McNamara et al. (1999) found that in the interviews that they conducted with Black-White couples in the South, that the participants in their study tend to react in ways that balanced each other out, for example, one partner may have reacted in a more passive manner, such as brushing off a negative response, while the other partner tended to be more confrontational. However, McNamara et al.'s study failed to clarify if there was a gendered pattern to the couples' responses. For instance, do males tend to respond more often with confrontation, whereas women tend to respond more passively to negative reactions? It was found in this study that men tend to be more protective of their female partners.

In this study, gender was an indicator of the way that participants respond and cope with societal racism. The women tended to react more calmly to negative reactions (e.g. ignoring, or dismissing), while the men in the study tended to react in a more confrontational manner by confronting the people who are giving the negative reactions. Males are not only more confrontational, but are also more protective of their partners (e.g. checking out a restaurant before taking his girlfriend there.) These two findings in this study involving men generally responding in a more confrontational manner and men tending to act protective of their partner in public situations, perhaps speaks of the cultural ideal of male dominance, and also the unique public obstacles that interracial couples face. As interracial couples face societal obstacles that most same race couples

do not contend with, males may feel it necessary to defend their relationship and protect their partner. These two developments deserve greater attention in order to better understand this pattern of male behavior.

## **Chapter V**

### **Family Response**

Family response is a central concern of Black-White interracial couples. In evaluating the interview data, it is clear that the respondents in this study experienced a spectrum of reactions from family members. Race to a large extent determines how families will react to an interracial relationship. Some interviewees spoke about how supportive their parents have been while others say that family members have shown disapproval of their relationship.

The majority (10 out of 12) of interviewees noted that they have experienced at least some degree of family acceptance in reaction to their interracial relationship. Of the 10 participants who mentioned family acceptance, 5 reported that both parents accepted their interracial relationship, and 5 reported that at least one of their parents have been accepting of their relationship. Black families tended to be more supportive and accepting of their family member's choice to be in an interracial relationship. Of the four Black respondents that were interviewed, all reported family acceptance of their relationship, and the majority reported both parent's acceptance of their relationship. Four of the five respondents who reported family acceptance from both their parents are from the non-Southern regions of the U.S.

Table 4. Family Response

---

Family	Both Accept	Both Disapprove	Mixed Reaction	Total Number
Black	3	0	1	4
White	2	2	4	8
South	1	2	4	7
Non-South	4	0	1	5

---

Cecil, who is from the North, explained that “it does not matter one way or another” who I date. He felt that his family’s sense of understanding stems from his father’s involvement with women of different racial backgrounds.

My dad has married a couple of White women, a couple of Black women. I have a sister [who is] adopted and she’s Black as Black can be, and then my brother, he is adopted and he looks exactly like me (bi-racial). If you did not know any better you would think we were blood. I have a brother who is White as White can be. His mom, well my mom, and his dad are White. So as far as my family is concerned it has never been an issue as far as whom you brought home.... I am a product of interracial dating and marriage. It would be odd for my parents to say we made you, but you cannot make anymore.

Rhonda, a White woman, from the Midwest explained her parents’ reaction to meeting her boyfriend.

They met him in early September... then they came down about 2 weeks ago and spent quite a bit of time. They are real open. They have always been like whatever makes you happy makes us happy. So it has never been an issue, if it is an issue, it has never been expressed to me that it is an issue.

Generally you can sense that kind of stuff, but I think they are pretty genuine people.

Cecil commented on the openness his girlfriend Rhonda has experienced from her family in reaction to her interracial relationship, “family upbringing makes a difference. She’s got interracial marriage in her family already.” Tamara, a Black Woman, whose family has spent a great deal of time in the North and whose mother accepted her relationship with a White man, explained that she preferred living in the North versus the South because “people are more open-minded to different things.” In the cases of family acceptance, factors such as already having an interracial relationship in the family, being from non-Southern regions, and parents’ open-mindedness toward interracial relationships seem to all be factors that contributed to greater family acceptance.

One of the new findings in the evaluation of family response is that in the cases where only one parent was accepting of their child’s interracial relationship, the mother was the parent who shows approval; not the father. White interviewees reported receiving more mixed family responses to their relationship than Black respondents. Four White respondents and one Black respondent said that their mother had accepted their relationship, while their father has not.

All respondents were asked questions about their family. In particular, they were asked if they had talked to their family about their interracial relationships. The majority of interviewees stated that they have told their mother, but not their father. Another new finding that has not been discussed in previous literature that was found in this study, is that most of the participants reported feeling more comfortable talking to their mothers about their relationship because they anticipated that their mother would be more

accepting of their relationship. Many participants had not yet talked to their father, fearing his reaction to their interracial relationship. Tamara, a Black female, told about her mother's reaction to her relationship with her White boyfriend.

Yeah, I do [talk about my relationship] with my mom, not my dad. ...My mom is going to love anyone that I love, because she trusts my judgment of males. If she knows that I love them then she will too, and my dad...I do not honestly to this day know how he honestly feels about me dating him.

Lori, a White female, also explained that she had different reactions from her mom and dad regarding her boyfriend. She relates, "My mom has never had a problem with me dating interracially, other than she does not want people to treat me bad... My dad on the other hand, is like, I cannot believe you let her do that! That was his initial response."

Lori talks about her relationship with her father,

I am uncomfortable talking to him, just because we do not have that kind of relationship. I will talk to my mom about anything, but my dad, it is just kind of hard because he is another gender, so that can be kind of hard, just because you do not exactly click on everything. ...I think he would be a lot more accepting when he began to realize it is not just a phase I was going through.

Summer, a White woman, first told her mother about her relationship, and chose to wait to tell her father, fearing his reaction to her dating someone Black.

I told my mom.... And me and mom knew for a while and we didn't tell my dad because he would freak out. Finally she was like, "do you think we should tell your dad?" ...She said it depends on how serious yall are, and I was like,



“momma I love him.” I really do and she [said] “well, I will go ahead and tell him then.”

Summer goes on to describe her father’s reaction to the news she was in love with a Black man.

One morning she (Summer’s mother) called me and...I was in bed and she woke me up. She told me that she had told daddy. And I was like, “How did he react?” She’s like, “It is not good at all.” And he would not talk to me for a while. It made him sick, literally, he would be throwing up and he was crying. I have never seen my dad cry before. [My mom] was like “Summer you need to call and talk to him,” but I was like “no” [because] I was too scared...

Pamela, a White woman, dating a Black male, also felt more comfortable telling her mother about her relationship, and still has not told her father, fearing his reaction to her interracial relationship, she explained, “...I did not even tell my dad cause he’d probably die...I just told my mom and she just gave me a look, and walked off.” Similarly, Wade felt that he cannot tell his father about his Black girlfriend at this time. Wade, however, felt more comfortable talking to his mom about the relationship, and shares his mother’s initial reaction to his relationship, “She didn’t like it at first, but she’s accepted it.... And now she loves Cleo...”

Wade gave the following description of his family:

My family is pure white through and through...in their own words they think you should “stick to your own kind”. On my dad’s side...they are real proud, real strong, just real heritage driven...They are just your typical rednecks, big truck driving, country music listening too, loving cows kind of thing.

When asked if he had told his dad yet, Wade gave this reply “no, my dad is too close-minded for that right now.” He planned to tell his father when he is sure that Cleo is the person that he wants to spend the rest his life with.

Obviously the interviewees in this study received greater acceptance of their relationship from their mothers and were more likely to talk about their relationship with their mothers. Perhaps, respondents more often felt comfortable talking to their mothers because mothers generally assume the role of the nurturing caretaker in the family. In the cases where female respondents did not feel comfortable talking to their father about their relationship, this might be attributed to possibly the gender gap between daughters and fathers.

In the cases where respondents have reported family acceptance, not all of the family members were initially accepting of their interracial relationship. Five of the nine respondents who have reported family acceptance also reported that their family was not accepting of the relationship initially. Tamara explained that her mother initially had some concerns over her relationship with a White man.

When I first started talking to him [we] were just kind of casually talking and my mom [said] she is kind of scared, because depending on if we were to actually get married and to have children, she would be afraid that certain people in the world, that are not open to interracial relationships might try to hurt me or him, or my children. So she’s always kind of scared about that aspect of it. Otherwise, my mom is going to love anyone that I love because she trusts my judgment of males and she knows that if I love them, then she will too.

Anna, a Black female, stated that her family was not initially accepting of her choice to date interracially. She explained, “my family had a problem with it at first, but now it is just a running joke. It is like, who is she going to bring home next. So they are not really worried about it.” Anna felt that since one of her cousins has married interracially, that her family has become more accepting of her choice to date across color lines. She explained that her “family really does not care as long as I am happy, and the guy is treating me right.” Along the same line, Wade, a White man, dating a Black woman, explained that his mother did not initially approve of his relationship.

My mom has known about Cleo for about a year and a half. We have dated for a little over 2 years. She did not like it at first, but she accepted it.... I know that she thought that this was just a phase, [and] that I would realize that a White woman was best for me, and I would just go back to dating a White girl. After she realized that there was something real there, she started accepting it and, slowly but surely, it turned out to be a good thing. Her way of looking at it is, as long as the person that I am with makes me happy, as long as I am done right, and as long as I get the respect that I deserve both as a man and as an individual, then everything is okay. Now she loves Cleo to death. They get along well and they talk to each other on the phone.

The participants’ experiences of having some family members who did not initially accept their relationship are consistent with research on family response. McNamara et al. (1999), Majete (2000) and Rosneblatt et al. (1995) have all noted that in some cases family members do not initially accept the relationship, but over time tend to become more accepting.

Along with positive family responses to the interviewees' relationship, many also face disapproval among certain family members. Specifically, 7 of the 12 respondents reported that they have received at least some degree of disapproval over their interracial relationship. Interestingly, in most cases where one of the participants' parents accepted the relationship while the other parent disapproved, the mother was perceived as the accepting parent and the father was perceived as the disapproving parent. Two of the participants had not yet told their father about their interracial relationship, fearing his response, and in one case fearing that they would be disowned. Many respondents perceived that their fathers *would* disapprove of their interracial relationship if they *knew* about it, but it is important to point out that one cannot assume that "not knowing," necessarily implies disapproval. Wade, a White male, dating a Black female, described how he predicted his father will react to the news that he is dating a Black woman, "he is either going to accept it or going to shun me and I am going to be out of his life..." Part of his reluctance to tell his father comes from the fact that his family is from the South and holds strong views about interracial relationships. Similarly, Pamela, a White woman, also fears her father's reaction to her relationship with a Black man due to her father's Southern background, "My dad's side [of the family], are all real down South, country people. I did not tell my dad cause he would probably die." For Wade and Pamela, region, plays a large role in their reluctance to talk about their interracial relationship with their fathers. Because their fathers have expressed prejudicial views toward interracial relationships, they fear their reaction to the news that they are dating someone Black.

Two out of the 12 respondents interviewed reported that they have received total disapproval of their interracial relationship from their families. In both cases, both of the interviewees who had disapproving families were White women. Beverly, a White woman, had to break off her relationship with her boyfriend, in part, because of her families' reaction to her relationship.

The last person that I dated was half White and half Black...and my mother does not approve of that. If it was a Spanish guy, I think it would be okay. My sister is dating a half Asian/ half American guy and my mom does not have a problem with that. I had to go behind her back and unfortunately I had to lie, and I do not like lying to my mother...so I just called it off. I had also dated a Black guy, like a full Black guy in the summertime...but my mother does not really approve of that or my father.

Pamela described her mother's reaction to the news she was dating a Black man, "I did not really know what to expect, and I thought they could [either] be like well, we do not approve, but we will let it happen, or they could go ballistic. I told my mom and she just gave me a look and walked off."

### *Summary and Conclusions*

Respondents in this study talked about a variety of responses from family members. The pattern of mixed reactions from family members is in keeping with research findings in the literature on interracial relationships. The majority of interviewees who reported mixed reactions (one family member who accepted the relationship while others may have rejected the coupling) were White. This too is

consistent with the research literature (McNamara et al., 1999; Majete, 2000; Rosenblatt et al., 1995).

New developments emerged when looking at how gender influences family response. In cases where one parent accepted the relationship and the other disapproved, respondents always perceived the mother as the accepting one, whereas the father was always thought to show disapproval. Previous research has documented that Black families are more accepting of interracial relationships than White families, but the research has failed to look at how mothers and fathers respond to their child's interracial relationship. Also the respondents, both males and females, have reported feeling more comfortable talking about their relationship with their mother. This is also an issue that has not been examined in the research on interracial relationships. Interviewees consistently disclosed that they felt more comfortable talking to their mothers about their relationship and that their mothers were more accepting of it. Two explanations are possible. Mothers really are more nurturing than fathers; whereas fathers are more protective and less sympathetic. Or alternatively, respondents, especially women, perceive their parents as conforming to traditional gender roles. Thus, a daughter was less likely to tell her father about her relationship because she presumed that he will object. If mothers were more likely than fathers to accept who their child dates, it might help to explain why scholars find that Black families are more accepting than White families, since Black families are more likely to be female headed. But assuming that women are more accepting of interracial romance, in general, does not help us to understand why interracial couples frequently report that Black women express disapproval of them in public situations. Clearly the relationship between a person's

gender and his or her attitudes about interracial romance is complex and deserves greater attention. Also region plays an important role in many cases where the respondents are reluctant to talk to their families about their interracial relationship. In these cases participants noted that their families are of Southern heritage and do not approve of interracial relationships.

It is important to point out that research on the White partner's family indicates that parents and family members tend not to initially accept the relationship. Several of the respondents in this study expressed that their families did not accept their interracial relationship at first, but over time became more accepting. Rosenblatt et al. (1995) note that in some cases it may seem as if family members will never become accepting of the relationship. The research does suggest that some families do move toward acceptance and tolerance of the relationship.

In the case of Black family response, all of the Black respondents interviewed in this study stated that they have received acceptance of their relationship from their families, with the majority reporting total acceptance from both parents. It has been widely noted that Black families tend to be more accepting of interracial relationships than White families. (McNamara et al. 1999; Majete, 2000; Rosenblatt et al., 1995; Schuman et al., 1997). It is also important to point out that in the cases where interviewees report total family acceptance of their relationship that the majority of these interviewees were from non-Southern regions, which is also consistent with the literature on interracial romance. Schuman et al. (1997) have documented that region plays an important role in racial attitudes toward intermarriage, and the authors have noted that Northerners tend to be more accepting toward interracial relationships than Southerners.

## Chapter VI

### Culture

When mixing together two different cultures into one romantic union there is often a clash of culture. Cultural differences between interracial couples, such as differences in gender roles, religion, ethnic language, and/or food preferences, can be for some, a *blessing* or a source of *conflict* (Burnette, 1995; Rosenblatt et al., 1995). For the couples in this study that perceive cultural differences, the majority of couples interviewed saw cultural differences as both a positive and negative aspect of being in an interracial relationship, but all admitted that the positives far outweighed the negatives. Tamara, a Black woman, discussed the issue of cultural differences in dating someone of another race, and how cultural clashes have affected her own relationship.

Well sometimes there might be a clash in cultures. Not necessarily in my situation because of the way that I have been raised. My parents have kept moving around to England, and places like that have kept my mind wide open to many other cultures. But I can see in some other relationships where the cultural differences might cause problems. Feeling that the other [person] does not understand where the other is coming from. Their feelings toward certain things, I guess interests being different mainly because of cultures. Because I have hung out with so many different types of people I understand. I probably do not understand, really his culture, or where he is coming from or how he feels about things, but I try to understand. I think I know the backgrounds a little so that



helps me, if he expressed his emotions on some things ...He on the other hand, I do not think he really has that same thing I have. If I was to start talking to him about slavery in the past and I was really adamant about slavery or something like that, I do not think that he would understand where I was coming from.

Anna, a Black female, discussed some of the differences in culture that she has encountered dating White men.

There are times when there is stuff that I have grown up knowing...[for example,] the kind of music my parents listen to, versus their parents. I will mention something and I will get a blank look, or certain terms that of course you grew up speaking and you will say it and people [are] just kind of like, ok.

Wade, a White male, talked about the cultural differences between him and his Black girlfriend and explained how he benefited as a person because of these differences.

One beautiful thing about an interracial relationship is that you get to immerse yourself in an entirely different culture. You immerse yourself in all different kinds of stuff. You get to try chittlens for the first time, which they are nasty. You get to talk to grandmamma, which you can barely understand because she speaks the real old Black language. If you ever talk to a real old Black woman, you can't understand a word that she's saying. She talks about 400 miles a second and none of it makes sense, but you've got to learn to immerse yourself into it. You learn more about Martin Luther King. You go watch [the film], *Malcolm X*, just to watch it and to find out about the struggles. You read about miscegenation. You now read all about that because you are so immersed in something that you do not understand, that you want to learn so much more about.

Once you learn something about it, it makes it so much more enriching. So much more fulfilling, because you share a common bond...I feel like I'm a better person for it and I feel like I grew because of it.

Rhonda, a White female, dating a Black man, told how being with someone of a different race and culture has changed the way she views the world.

For myself I think that I have gained knowledge into his [world] and I can see the world a little bit through his eyes now. I am a minority by being a woman and obviously the White male is the top dog. I can identify with things that he says because in a sense, I am a minority too. I hit that glass ceiling too. I see a lot more because he is very open and vocal about what he thinks and feels and for me that has been very educational.

Rhonda also told about some of the opportunities she has had to share in her boyfriend's culture.

We went over to his neighbor's [house] the other night, and I had some soul food. I had some homemade greens for the first time in my entire life and that's cool to me. Why not do that? ...It's just sharing in another culture and another background.

### *Summary and Conclusion*

Overall, most of the participants in this study found that the experience of being in a Black-White relationship is very rewarding. Although some of the participants in this study mentioned that at times there were clashes of culture which caused tension, for the most part they felt that their differences have helped them to grow as a people. The mixed emotions over the positives and negatives of combining two cultures into one was

typical of the research literature on interracial romance. Burnette (1995) has documented that sometimes clashes in culture may occur over ethnic differences, such as language, values, or religion, but on the other hand, many of the interracial couples in Rosenblatt et al.'s (1995) study, indicated that these differences are really blessings. Some of the respondents in this study said that immersing oneself in a different culture, and seeing the world through the eyes of their partner, has been an enlightening experience that has helped them to learn more about the other culture. Rhonda reported, "I think I have gained knowledge into his [world]...and for me that has been very educational." From the perceptions of cultural differences, it seems as if the good outweighs the bad, and that the couples in this study benefited greatly from being in a relationship with someone of another race and culture.

## **Chapter VII**

### **Conclusion**

From the analysis of the Black-White interracial couples living in the South Georgia area, it is clear that the issues that are central to the research literature, including: family response, public reaction, and cultural differences, are also salient issues in the lives of the interracial couples in this study. This study provided a much needed look into the dating experiences of Black-White couples in the South. There has been relatively little in-depth qualitative research conducted on interracial couples, in the South, and particularly in the Deep South. This study also contributed to the existent research on interracial couples by providing a more personal account of couples' perceptions of family responses, public reactions, cultural differences, and perspectives on racial attitudes toward interracial romance in the South. From a close analysis of the intersection of race and gender, four new developments emerged concerning family responses and public reactions. First, couples reported feeling more comfortable talking to their mother about their relationship than to their father, and in cases where respondents reported mixed reactions, mothers were always the accepting parent while fathers were always thought to be the disapproving parent. Second, it was found that males were more likely to respond to negative public reactions with confrontation, while females responded more often in a passive manner. Also, the findings revealed that males tended to be more protective of their female partner when it comes to issues of negative public reactions. These new developments will be discussed more in-depth, but

first let us recount how the couples' experiences dating interracially in the South compared to the national-level statistics, trends, and patterns.

Many of the findings yielded from this study seem to be in keeping with the national-level statistics, patterns, and trends on Black-White relationships. The Black partners' families tended to be more accepting of interracial relationships, whereas, White families tended to respond more often with mixed reactions to the relationship (e.g. one parent approves, while others might disagree). These findings fit into the general pattern of family response found in previous research (McNamara et al., 1999; Majete, 2000; Rosenblatt et al., 1995). Also, many of the respondents said that over time their disapproving family member became more accepting of their interracial relationship, which is also in keeping with research findings (McNamara et al., 1999; Majete, 2000; Rosenblatt et al., 1995).

Interviewees' experiences with public reactions were also in agreement with the research on societal reactions to interracial relationships, in the following ways: most respondents made known that *stares* were the most common of public reactions to their relationship; most public reactions were considered casual with no reports of serious mishaps; respondents perceive that the more negative responses to their relationship come from Black females; respondents also noted that to a lesser degree negative reactions tended to come from young White fraternity members, Black males, and older White couples, with no reports of any type of negative reactions from White females; and the respondents coped with negative responses in varying ways, such as ignoring reactions or in some cases with confrontation. All of the above findings are supported in the research. It is widely recognized that the most common reactions to interracial

couples are stares, or negative comments, versus more extreme reactions such as physical threats or physical attacks. Researchers have also found that Black-White couples tend to perceive Black females as the most opposed to interracial romance (Rosenblatt et al., 1995; Zebroski, 1999). White fraternity and sorority members tend to be less racially tolerant than non-Greeks on college campuses (Morris, 1991; Muir, 1990; Wood & Chessser, 1994). Zebroski's (1999) study demonstrates that White females are perceived as the least opposed to interracial relationships. He has also documented that couples tend to use different coping methods in response to societal racism. For instance, one partner may respond by dismissing the reactions, while the other partner may respond to the reaction in a confrontational manner (McNamara et al., 1999)

The issue of cultural differences is also in keeping with the literature on interracial romance. The literature has documented that for some couples, cultural differences such as differences in language, foods, and religious beliefs can be a source of conflict for interracial couples (Burnette, 1995). Or as Rosenblatt et al. (1995) have found in the interviews they conducted with Black-White couples, sometimes these differences are considered blessings. For the couples in this study that perceive cultural differences between themselves and their partner, they see these differences as both positive and negative aspects. But the couples seemed to feel that the positives far outweighed the negatives. Many of the respondents claimed that differences in food, heritage, and life experiences were advantages of being in an interracial relationship; it gave them the opportunity to learn about another culture.

Several new developments emerged from this study. First, in analyzing how race and gender shape family relations, it became clear that the participants perceive their

mothers and fathers responded differently to their interracial relationship. All the respondents who reported mixed reactions from their parents (where one parent was seen as approving; the other parent was seen as disapproving) the mother is always perceived as the accepting parent, while the father is always thought to be the disapproving parent. In addition, in the majority of these cases the families are White. Respondents also expressed that they feel more comfortable talking to their mother about their relationship than their father, regardless of the gender of the respondent. Currently, there is not any research that discusses the different ways that parents respond to interracial romance. Clearly, gender plays a major role in the difference between parents' responses. Perhaps the respondents' tendency to feel more comfortable talking about their relationship with their mother can be attributed to their belief that their mothers were the nurturing caretaker, whereas fathers are more traditionally seen as the providers and protectors of the family. Also, female respondents may have preferred to talk about their relationship with their mothers because of a gender gap between fathers and daughters.

Second, gender seemed to make a difference in the ways that couples responded to negative public reactions. Research has documented that couples often respond and cope with negative reactions differently, and that their responses tend to balance each other out (McNamara et al., 1999). For instance one partner may laugh off a negative reaction, while another partner may confront the one who is giving the reaction (McNamara et al., 1999). However, research failed to examine which partner tended to respond more passively and which partner responded more aggressively. In this study the females tended to respond more passively, such as ignoring the reaction, or brushing the reaction off, while male respondents tended to react in a more confrontational manner.

All of these findings raise new questions about the role that race and gender play in societal reactions to interracial romance, and reaffirms the importance of these two elements in the evaluation of public responses. These new developments are areas in the interracial romance literature that have yet to be explored, but deserve more attention.

Often in the literature on racial attitudes, researchers have looked at how White Americans versus Black Americans view interracial romance, or how age, education, or region affects Americans' attitudes on dating across the color lines. Although these types of evaluations of racial attitudes are valuable tools to better understand the contemporary dynamics of racial attitudes and race relations in the U.S., researchers have failed to ask the interracial couples themselves how they perceive their relationship. Perhaps by seeking to better understand how couples view their relationship, we can better understand how society views interracial romance. This paper explored the central themes such as family responses, public reactions, and cultural issues – but went a step beyond the major themes to examine couples' perceptions about how others view their involvement in an interracial relationship. It is also important to acknowledge that since the couples' perceptions are based on their experiences dating in the Deep South, their perceptions are a reflection on the contemporary dynamics of race relations in the South Georgia area. From this analysis, respondents perceived that the people closest to them, such as family and friends, tend to be more accepting of their relationship. From their experiences dating in the South, many said that there were certain people who still did not accept and approve of interracial dating. Although they agree that some members of society were not accepting of their relationship, all agreed that in general, American racial attitudes toward interracial romance are changing. Many saw a trend toward more



favorable attitudes of interracial romance, and contributed this positive change in racial attitudes to the *melting pot* ideology.

The study of Black-White interracial romance is a vital part of the research on race relations in the United States. Interracial relationships are a growing trend in our country, with recent studies clearly indicating that barriers to mixed marriages are dissolving (Heaton & Albrecht, 1996, p.203; Stokes, 1996; Surro, 1999. p.58). Data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census indicates that the number of Black-White couples nearly quintupled from 1970 to 1994 (Hill & Volker, 2000). However, despite the growing number of interracial marriages, the South lags behind other regions (Heaton & Albrecht, 1996). Considering current interracial marriage trends, which have been discussed throughout this paper, it is clear that interracial relationships are on the rise. One could certainly predict with the growing number of mixed-race couples in our contemporary society that this trend will continue to increase into the future. Given the prevalence of interracial romance in our society, and that family response and public reactions continue to be two of the greatest issues that interracial couples face, it remains to be seen that there is still to some degree resistance and opposition to this growing trend. From the findings in this study, one can see that this is particularly true of the South. In future research, the next step is to look at how Black-White couples' perceptions of their interracial romance, affect how they view themselves.

In the future, the application of Charles Horton Cooley's *looking glass perspective* could help researchers not only understand how couples perceive themselves through their experiences, but how other members of society view interracial romance, and how society's view shapes the image couples have of themselves. Cooley's theory of

the *looking glass self* implied a social-psychological process in which one can only form an image of himself or herself through the reflection of another's perspective (Cooley, 1983;2001). His theory maintains that an individual imagines how they must appear to others and imagines others' judgment of that appearance, and therefore forms a self concept, "called the reflected or looking-glass self" (p.17). In essence, Cooley's theory can be summarized as how we imagine our appearance to be through the eyes of others, how we imagine other's judge that appearance, and how these imagined perceptions comprise one's sense of self identity. Cooley (1983;2001) explained that as we "see our face, figure and dress in the glass...so in imagination we perceive in another's mind some thought of our appearance, manners, aims, deeds, character, friends, and so on, and are variously affected by it (p.17). Therefore, with the perceptions of couples' experiences dating interracially in the South, one could take these perceptions to the next level by evaluating how couples' perceptions shape couples' self concept, through exploring how couples imagine other's perceptions of them, and judgments of their relationship. For example, it was found in this study that fathers were perceived as more disapproving than mothers of interracial relationships. The respondents obviously feared telling their father about the relationship, fearing that he would disapprove, therefore, how does the father's perceived disapproval shape the respondent's own self-concept, and their image of their interracial relationship. This question and others could be better evaluated through the application of Cooley's looking glass self theory, which would enable future researchers to not only understand how Black-White couples view themselves as reflected through the mirror of society, but would also be a valuable measure of societal views of interracial romance.

By analyzing 12 in-depth interviews with individuals who live in the South Georgia area, and who are involved in a Black-White interracial relationship, I explained how respondents perceived of dating interracially in the South, how they think others reacted to their relationship through an analysis of public reactions, and how couples perceived family response to their relationship. All in all, looking at the Black-White couples' perspectives offers greater insights into how the couples themselves viewed their relationship. This contribution is important not only to understanding how couples experience interracial dating, but in future research could also help scholars to better understand how these perceptions shape interracial couples' perceptions of themselves through the mirror of society.

<sup>1</sup> In the state of Alabama there remains a state law on the books prohibiting interracial marriages within the state. This state statute prohibiting interracial marriages contradicts federal law, which does not allow a prohibition of such marriages. The state of Alabama's constitution prohibits interracial marriages, but federal law makes this statute obsolete. Currently, the Messenger, an Alabama news source, reports that the state is considering striking down this statute banning interracial marriages. (Blackley, 2000).

## REFERENCES

- Burnette, E. (1995, September). The strengths of mixed race relationships. *Monitor*. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/monitor/sep95/race.html>.
- Census, U. S. B. o. t. (2000). *Characteristics of unmarried and married female couples* (Current Populations Survey). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Cooley, C. H. (1983). The Self as Sentiment and Reflection. In S.E. Cahill's (Ed.), *Inside Social Life: Readings in Sociological Psychology and Microsociology* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Roxbury Publishing Co.
- Dalmage, H. (2000). *Tripping the color line: Black-White multiracial families in a racially divided world*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Gmelch, S. B. (1998). *Gender on campus: Issues for college women*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Heaton, T. B., & Albrecht, S. L. (1996). The changing pattern of interracial marriage. *Social Biology*, 43(3-4), 204-217.
- Hill, M. R., & Thomas, V. (2000). Strategies for racial identity development: Narratives of black and white women in interracial partner relationship. *Family Relations*, 49(2), 193-201.
- London, S. (2000). Interracial marriage is a step toward a more integrated culture. In B. J. Grapes (Ed.), *Interracial Relationships*. San Diego, CA: Greenhaven Press, Inc.

- Macionis, J.J., *Sociology*, (1999) (7<sup>th</sup> ed.) New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River.
- McNamara, R., Tempenis, M., & Walton, B. (1999). *Crossing the line: Interracial couples in the South*. London: Greenwood Press.
- Passet, P. S., & Taylor, R. D. (1991). Black and white women's attitudes toward interracial marriage. *Psychological Records*, 69, 753-754.
- Root, M. P. (2001). *Loves Revolution: Interracial marriage*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Rosenblatt, P. C., Karis, T. A., & Powell, R. D. (1995). *Multiracial couples: Black and white voices*. California: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Schuman, H., Steeh, C., Bobo, L., & Krysan, M. (1997). *Racial attitudes in America: Trends and interpretations* (2nd ed.). Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Staples, R. (1981). *The world of black singles: Changing patterns of male/female relations*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press.
- St. Jean, Y., & Parker, R. E. (1995). Disapproval of Interracial Unions. In C. K. Jacobson (Ed.), *American Families: Issues in Race and Ethnicity*. New York: Garland Publishing Inc.
- Suro, R. (1999). Mixed doubles. Retrieved from [http://demographics.com/publications/ad/99\\_ad\\_9911ad/as9911.htm](http://demographics.com/publications/ad/99_ad_9911ad/as9911.htm)
- Wilson, Deborah S., & Jacobson, Cardell K. (1995). White Attitudes Towards Black and White Interracial Marriage. In C. K. Jacobson (Ed.), *American Families: Issues in Race and Ethnicity*. New York: Garland Publishing Inc.

Zebroski, S. A. (1999). Black-White intermarriage: The racial and gender dynamics of support and opposition. *Journal of Black Studies*, 30(1), 123- 132.

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### Interview Schedule

#### BACKGROUND

- Tell me a little bit about how you met and 1<sup>st</sup> started dating.
- When and where was this?
- Had you ever dated interracially before?
- What 1<sup>st</sup> attracted you to \_\_\_\_?
- Where do you go on a typical date?

---

#### FAMILY

- Tell me about your family.
- In general how close would you say you are to your family?
- Have you met each other's family? If so, what was that like, and who's family have you spent more time with?
- Do you talk about your relationships with anyone in your family?
- What about this relationship?  
Do you discuss the fact that your relationship is interracial?  
If so, how did your family members react?
- Did you expect the reaction you got?

---

#### PUBLIC

- Have you ever been in a public situation you were aware that others noticed you as an interracial couple? How?
- If there has ever been a time when you received a negative public reaction to your relationship, in what ways did you respond to the situation?  
If not, why do you think you that you've never experienced a negative reaction and how do you think you might act if you were placed in a situation where you did receive a negative public reaction, for example stares or negative comments? In what ways might you cope with that type of situation?
- Are there any public places you seek out or avoid because you are interracial couples? Why?
- How do you think others perceive your interracial relationship?



- In general how do you think society, at large views interracial couples? Have you noticed a difference between the regions of the country, for example between the South and North? Is there any difference between campus versus off campus?
- Do you think that attitudes toward interracial relationships are changing? Why or why not?

---

#### MISCELLANEOUS

- Is there anything that I didn't ask today that you thought was important for me to know?
- In general, what are positive and negative aspects of being in an interracial relationship?

#### Demographics

Age \_\_\_\_\_

Gender \_\_\_\_\_

Race \_\_\_\_\_

Hometown: City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

Religion \_\_\_\_\_

Educational Level \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B

Georgia Southern University  
Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs

## Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Phone: 912-681-5465

Fax: 912-681-0719


Ovrsight@gasou.edu

P.O. Box 8005

Statesboro, GA 30460-8005

**To:** Celeste A. Wheat  
Sociology Department

**Cc:** Dr. Peggy Hargis, Faculty Advisor  
Sociology Department

**From:** Mr. Neil Garretson, Coordinator   
Research Oversight Committees (IACUC/IBC/IRB)

**Date:** January 31, 2002

**Subject:** Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research

After an expedited review of your proposed research project titled "A Sociological Perspective on Black-White Interracial Couples in the South," it appears that the research subjects are at minimal risk and appropriate safeguards are in place. I am, therefore, on behalf of the Institutional Review Board able to certify that adequate provisions have been planned to protect the rights of the human research subjects. This proposed research is approved through an expedited review procedure as authorized in the *Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects* (45 CFR §46.110(7)), which states:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

**This IRB approval is in effect for one year from the date of this letter.** If at the end of that time, there have been no changes to the exempted research protocol, you may request an extension of the approval period for an additional year. In the interim, please provide the IRB with any information concerning any significant adverse event, whether or not it is believed to be related to the study, within five working days of the event. In addition, if a change or modification of the approved methodology becomes necessary, you must notify the IRB Coordinator prior to initiating any such changes or modifications. At that time, an amended application for IRB approval may be submitted. Upon completion of your data collection, please notify the IRB Coordinator so that your file may be closed.